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CHAPTER VII

# BIRTH, ADOLESCENCE, MARRIAGE

*Birth—Childhood Instruction—Puberty Rites—Marriage*

## Birth

IT was impossible to obtain definite data on the fertility of Bella Coola women, or on the period elapsing between marriage and the birth of the first child. Sterility is rare, though by no means unknown; on the other hand, there are several families with as many as eight or nine children. The changed conditions which have followed the advent of the white man seem to have had little influence on the high birth-rate, although infant mortality has increased enormously. Within the last few years this has diminished, so that the Bella Coola are now holding their own. Children are always desired, and although methods of abortion and infanticide have been known for many years, neither practice seems to have been sufficiently common to have produced an appreciable effect on the population.

Pregnancy usually occurs during the year following marriage. Though its actual dependence upon coition is fully realized, yet the Bella Coola, religiously minded in this as in all other aspects of life, ascribe the condition to the four *Mesmesälänux* acting on the behest of *Älquntäm*. It is believed that the Carpenters carve out the child who is to be born in the same way that a human craftsman manufactures some complicated object. Most individuals do not theorize to any extent upon the course of biological development, but are content to assume that *Älquntäm* has made the coming birth possible.

During pregnancy the expectant mother must observe certain restrictions. If she chews gum, she will have a difficult delivery; if she eats salmon tails, the feet of the infant will appear before the head, and although skilled assistants can usually rotate a child, this is a painful process which should be avoided.

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000 the perils of infancy. During this period, the mother observes
846 various magical taboos to ensure the welfare of her offspring,
237 and endeavours to strengthen herself by rubbing her own body with non-odoriferous oils obtained from dog-fish, geese, or fresh olachen. Soft pounded salmon and water are added to an
853 infant's diet as soon as possible, though nourishment from the breast frequently continues until a child is two, or even three
862 years of age. It is not uncommon to delay weaning until the mother is again pregnant, when the child is deterred by the application of soot to the breasts. Marital relations are recom-
846 menced as soon as the mother is strong enough; there is no specified period of abstinence, nor does it matter whether or not the woman is lactative.

845 Occasionally, an infant is born with teeth; such an one is thought to be the reincarnation of a dead ancestor, though no one knows which. A similar belief is held respecting a child with dimples in the lobes of its ears; these are regarded as remnants of the holes pierced for ear-rings. A child that cries in the womb is said to have great intellect.

847 In former times infanticide was practised for various reasons. If a woman died in giving birth, it was customary for her mother to kill the child unless one of her relatives was able to suckle the motherless infant who was then given to her. It was not unknown for the mother of a large family to ask the midwife to kill the child in order to avoid an addition to her responsibilities. An unmarried girl who became pregnant
[848] often went alone to the forest, delivered herself without assistance, and killed her infant. This was considered to be the kindest act, since an illegitimate child was said to be, "Like a Dog." In some cases the prospective mother requested a friend to cause abortion by kneading the stomach and uterus, a method said to be effective and seldom fatal. How to do
[195] so is common knowledge, but to practise it is considered disgraceful, and the term *ixwoti*, applied to such an one, is among the most foul of Bella Coola opprobriums. It is believed that
842 a woman who has had several children can in some way prevent

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further conceptions by wriggling her body on her haunches immediately after the delivery of a child. 842

To the Bella Coola religious concepts of birth are as important as the physiological aspects. The blood discharged at birth, and the mother from whom it has come, is *sxaiäx*, a word difficult to translate. It is applied to a person or thing which is taboo, and combines the significance of "uncanny," "abhorred," "to be avoided," "feared"; perhaps "unclean," in the biblical sense, is the best synonym. Essentially human, this blood is not only potent against supernatural beings, but is dangerous to man as well. For this reason a mother must never be delivered within a house. The smell of the unclean blood might kill all resident within, or at least prevent them receiving presents of any kind. Supernatural beings and inherent supernatural powers are alike repelled by it. 826 844 783

A recent mother is taboo and must exercise due precautions to prevent her baneful influence from affecting her associates, but this power is most strongly present in one who has borne twins. Even younger people, sophisticated in most matters, shudder when speaking of twins; fortunately, double births are not common. They are attributed to the entry of a salmon into the body, so that a twin is half-salmon, half-human. Occasionally a woman who is pregnant with twins discovers her condition in a dream and avoids the perils of a multiple birth by calling upon a shaman to remove the spirit from one foetus so that the infant will be born dead and deformed. If this is not done, the two infants arrive in due course, to the horror and grief of parents and relatives. Though abhorred, no case is known of the killing of a twin at birth. 845 [825] [787] [756] [847]

Instead of the two children being brought back to the village, word is sent to the father who must join his wife in the temporary shelter in the woods where delivery took place. For one year, they must not return home, and during this period must eat no salmon. Four times during the year they must shift from one shelter to another, each built on the bank of a small creek. The mother can draw water from this stream

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box during his absence. As soon as she had found the figures, she called in all the people, showed them her discovery, and suggested throwing them into the fire. Some objected, pointing out that if *Kăloti* had been using them, their destruction would cause his death. It was decided to test him, so no one told the lover that he had been found out, and he suspected nothing on his return. When he went into another house, *Kwa-tsus* placed the figures near the fire; immediately, *Kăloti* tried to lie down at the edge of the one near him, and was restrained only by some of the bystanders. This proved his guilt conclusively. *Kwa-tsus* washed the figures to destroy their power, which caused *Kăloti* to lose his desire to enter a fire, and at the same time destroyed the love of the two girls for him. 832

This medicine can be made only by a skilful carpenter; its real potency lies in the ingredients though the figures cause it to work more speedily.

*To Strengthen Virility*

This medicine is used by old men. 833

Catch a porcupine alive and cut out a quill from near its tail so that the blood flows freely. Prick the penis with the quill until the human blood mingles with the animal's. Potency follows at once. 886 825

*To Cause Conception*

A medicine was formerly known to cause a first conception, but it has been forgotten. A mother, however, who has just lost an infant, can ensure the birth of another by bringing a stone from the cemetery four days after her bereavement. If she leaves this beneath her bed for four nights, and then throws it away carelessly, anywhere, she will soon be pregnant. 842 789

*To Prevent Conception*

A medicine with this effect was formerly known but has been forgotten.

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842 789 *To Cause Birth of a Child of the Desired Sex*

If a boy is desired: The pregnant woman must have prepared for her a miniature bow and arrows on which she sleeps for four nights and then throws into the fire.

If a girl is desired: The pregnant woman must have prepared for her miniature tools used for beating cedar-bark on which she sleeps for four nights and then throws into the fire.

843 789 *To Cause Easy Delivery* (two means)

(1) The pregnant woman must boil stalks of stonecrop in water and drink freely of the decoction.

(2) A variant of the medicine already described can be applied during pregnancy. Strike the back of the woman with one or more porcupine embryos. The thrower must remain in concealment and the woman to be benefited must be unaware of what is about to be done.

853 757 *To Cause Increased Flow of Milk*

Heat pods of *Sedum Spathulifolium* (Hook) and apply them as a poultice to the breasts of the nursing mother.

### MISCELLANEOUS MEDICINES USED BY ADULTS

461 789 825 *To Cause Energy*

Take the paw of a freshly killed beaver in one hand and pat it with the other, saying:

"Please, may I be like you."

This ensures that the man or woman will always work hard, like a beaver.

789 825 886 *To Cause Long Life*

Pick up a toad, spit on it four times, saying:

"May I be strong like you," and put it down carefully.

The basis of this medicine is the belief that toads are capable of resisting greater pressure than other animals. For example, if one is caught in an olachen net, it survives the crushing weight of fish and water and is alive when the net is emptied, though all other living animals so ensnared are killed.

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*192
[824] *kat'nlh:* Tree, probably birch.
*Kalaxak':* One of the first men to settle at *Q̇wiyai* in the beginning of time.
*Kalakx:* One of the first men to settle at *Snulali* in the beginning of time.
*Kalkm:* Bella Bella woman mentioned in an ancient story.
*Kalul:* Kimsquit man.
[222] *Kalqum:* *Kusiut* name of a Bella Coola man.
[262] *kalqum:* The gathering of fern root for food.
*Kalqumakmm:* Name conferred on their sister by the first settlers at *Stuxx* in the beginning of time.
*Ka'lax-a:* Kimsquit man mentioned in an ancient story.
[585] *kalxmklimsta:* Public oration, previous to marriage, of the bride's ancestral myths
[842] in order to cause children to be born.
*kalqwm:* Ritual on the day before a marriage, including the oration of myths by the bride's relatives, the choosing of assistants, and the singing of songs of all kinds.
[576] *Kamai-ts:* 1—Mysterious supernatural woman.
2—"Please," or "Thank You," a word implying benison.
*Kamalxoy":* 1—One of the first men to settle at *Nuiaux* in the beginning of time.
2—One of the first men to settle at *Nusdalst* in the beginning of time.
3—Name of the first sky that fell in the beginning of time.
*Kamalxlkl:* Lazy supernatural beings who accompanied *Noakgmm.*
*Kamalqwax:* Man mentioned in an origin myth of *Alqalaxl.*
*Kamatslaks:* *Kusiut* name of a Kimsquit man.
*Kamatsxoy":* House brought to earth by first settlers at *Nusdalst* in the beginning of time.
[824] *kamk':* Kelp.
[227] *kamola:* Cod hook.
*kamut:* Termination.
[824] *kandu-i:* 1—Shelf fungus.
2—*Kusiut* dance in which a shelf fungus is used.
*Kanilku:* One of the first women to settle at *Stuxx* in the beginning of time.
*kan-imut:* Ceremonial error.
*Kanuxia:* Herald of a *Tal-is* chief in the beginning of time.
*kaokaz:* Trap.
*Kanxalaam:* 1—Daughter of the first settlers at *Sitlia* in the beginning of time.
2—Daughter of *Ojimai*, one of the first settlers in the upper Bella Coola valley in the beginning of time.
[264] *kaulikta:* Assemblage of the people for a meal of any kind.
*Kaxspoklamm:* One of the first men to settle at Rivers Inlet in the beginning of time.
*Kawaikudjax-a:* Supernatural berry-picker resident in the land of ghosts.
[825] *kdjal:* 1—Hump-back salmon.
2—Convex transverse beam near front and rear of house.
3—Mountain on the Dean River.
*Kgaix:* *Awaik* name of a Kimsquit man.
*Kgatna:* Man mentioned in an ancient story of Raven.
[752] *kgiut:* The seeking for shaman's power by a lad.
[825] *kgmix:* Golden eagle.
*kgukm:* Top, toy.
[524]

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corner of the house. He prevents those who are not initiated in the secrets of the kt'sint from approaching the house. The Sisiu'tq is a fabulous monster, the peculiarities of which are described in a number of traditions (see pp. 83 ff.). S'aoLa'mmLa'lt (Plate VII, Figs. 12 and 13) is a boy who performs kt'sint dances all the time. When the deities resolve to send a new dance down to our world, it is conveyed by S'aoLa'mmLa'lt. It is the office of another deity to sing, accompanying the kt'sint dances of the gods (Plate VII, Fig. 3). Anuqut'o'tsem is a deity in regard to whose functions I have not been able to obtain detailed information. It is said that he intervenes on behalf of man when Sanx and Atk'untz'm threaten to punish him. There are two goddesses in the house who also intervene in favor of man when the principal deities threaten him with death and sickness. Their names are Sntsmu'sa (Plate VII, Fig. 9) and Aiaxlit'axa (Plate VII, Figs. 10 and 11). They wake man after sleep. Without their help, nobody could wake from sleep. Aiaxlit'axa is at the same time the guardian of the moon. Every month she restores the moon to her full size, and she cleans her face after an eclipse. The moon is called A'm.'ts.g'ila (Plate X, Fig. 10). The eclipse is produced by several deities called Aiq'ut'yoxsam, which means "painting the face black" (Plate X, Figs. 4-6). It is believed that at this time the moon performs one of the most sacred ceremonies of the kt'sint, which are thought to be very dangerous to the performer. The black paint with which her face is covered is supposed to be a protection against these dangers. Aiaxlit'axa cleans off the paint after the dance has been completed. According to Jacobsen,[1] the Indians say that during an eclipse the moon (En-kle-ht'-kille) paints her face black. The same deities are believed to paint and to clean the faces of human kt'sint dancers. Sntsmu'sa and Aiaxlit'axa also resuscitate those who are killed by the dangerous performances of the kt'sint.

While the functions of the beings enumerated here are mostly concerned with the kt'sint, others are more immediately concerned with the affairs of the world. Important among these is K'vaxvkmai'm (Plate VII, Fig. 5). Sanx is the creator of man, but his work is supplemented by that of the god K'vaxvkmai'm. When Sanx creates a new-born child, K'vaxvkmai'm gives the child its individual features. Before children are born, the goddess named Natsxqmaiaai'x or Stsmotsm'hatsa Sasxaiit'm.atis places them in a cradle and rocks them. After she comes rocking them, the children are sent down to our world. She also rocks the young of all animals; and when she stops, Sanx sends them down to our world to be born. At the same time he ordains that their skins and their flesh shall serve for clothing and food for man. Natsxqmaiaai'x might therefore be called the deity

[1] Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte, 1884, p. 111

having charge of the birth of all animal beings. While she is rocking the cradle, she sings,—

"[illegible]"

Another deity living in the House of Myths is the mother of flowers, called Nemt'emga (Plate X, Figs. j and g), the daughter of Seskqa'ts'ots. It seems that this last name means "going to the right." This evidently refers to the fact that the sun is believed to move on his path towards the west, face forward, and consequently during the spring months towards the sky moving towards the right; so that Seskqa'ts'ots, moving to the right, means at the same time the springtime, when the sun is moving up the sky. This is the time when flowers begin to sprout. Every spring Nemt'emga gives birth to all the plants in the order in which they begin to appear. A shaman is called to her aid by two old women who assist her (Plate X, Figs. 8 and 11).

Every year, at the time of the winter solstice, the deities determine who shall die during the ensuing year. Two beings called Kakemat'is, the tsat'seme are placed on the ends of a long plank, which is supported at its centre, and swings like a seesaw. There all the men and all the animals are called to stand near the ends of the plank. When one of the swinging beings falls down from the plank, the person standing near it will die sooner than the one standing at the opposite end. The deities have a messenger called Nanxlaxa'lika (that means "long ear"), who carries all the news from our earth up to the House of Myths. Ax.k'umi'e has two children,—the elder, who is called Gwat'lexala Ax.k'umi'e, that is, "the foolish son of Ax.k'umi'e" (Plate VII, Fig. 8), and consequently Ax.k'umi'e. I have not been able to learn any thing in regard to the functions of these two beings.

While Sisaa and Ax.k'umi'e are principally concerned with the fate of mankind, they do not personally interfere with the doings of men. Their daughters are carried out by four brothers, who are called collectively Nanamal'ala or Qaxk'a'nemxsem (Plate VIII, Figs. 1–4). These brothers are Nanqa'lisala ("the one who finishes his work by chopping once"), Yaxl'ilem ("the one who finishes his work by rubbing once"), Nanlqa'lemala ("the one who finishes his work by cutting once"), and X.ka'lak'. They have a sister called LVigumikx. These four brothers live in an elevated room in the rear of the House of Myths. They are engaged in carving and painting. It is said that they gave man his arts. They taught him to build canoes, to make boxes, to build houses, and to carve in wood and to